

Guidelines and Terms

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Know that there is always more to learn and unlearn, more to discover about the world, our society, and ourselves.

Lean into discomfort. If you feel uncomfortable tonight at any moment, if something doesn't sit right with you, if you want to object - that's when to think more, have more conversations, seek to learn and stretch. Note those moments, and continue to explore them after this seder. This is what we call "productive discomfort."

If we turn aside, we are not just avoiding bad news, we are allowing our comfort to be more important than the pain of our fellow humans. This means that sometimes when our Black friends, family and community members come to us with their stories of marginalization and violence we are shocked, in disbelief, and doubt their truth because we've spent so long shielding ourselves. We can end up denying the truths of the people we love.

When we listen and learn from each other, we can become stronger without having to become numb. We can support our friends. We can truly be there for each other – and not bystanders.

Assume the best about each other and yourself. Give yourself and other people the opportunity to learn. But don't let things go. If you hear something in your conversations that doesn't feel right, say something. Challenge each other with compassion and love foremost in your minds, for the sake of all of us learning together and for the health of our community.

The division of humans into races is a social, cultural, scientific, economic, political and legal construct whose legacy will remain with us until we learn to constructively converse about bias, prejudice and discrimination. Most of us - regardless of color - are terrified to have this discussion. Our terror may be because these conversations profoundly disrupt our deepest ideas of who we are and how we see others.

In this haggadah we mostly use the term Black with a capital B, to honor the way many of our allies and Jewish brothers and sisters identify at this time. We also use the term African American when that is the preferred identity. African American primarily refers to Americans who are descended from enslaved Africans, and can also include other people of African heritage in the Americas.

We're using the term gentile to refer to people who aren't Jewish, to use a positive rather than negative definition.

People of Color is a general term that includes ethnic, racial, indigenous and cultural groups from the United States and around the world; including but not limited to East and South Asians, South and Central Americans, Arabs, Persians, and North African and Middle Eastern Jews (some but not all Sephardim and Mizrachim). The term "people of color" signifies that we are people first, and to define solidarity between marginalized racial groups by reclaiming the idea of "color" as a positive attribute. When we say Black and Brown, we mean primarily Black, Latin@, Arab, Persian, South Asian, and indigenous people. This is also a preferred term in common use in the progressive movement today.

This seder focuses primarily on racism targeting Black people because Black people continue to be primary representatives of the racial ills in America, including racial hierarchy. We recognize that race is one form of oppression that people face and that it intersects with other interconnected forms of oppression including xenophobia, sexism, ageism, classism, homophobia, anti-Semitism, ableism, and more. By focusing on fully liberating those most deeply affected by any form of oppression we ensure that all of us are liberated from its chains.

The current Black Lives Matter movement for liberation calls on us to dismantle this racial hierarchy. Our Jewish tradition also calls on us to pay attention to the lives of Jews of Color. After all, how can white-skinned Jews demand racial justice if we are not embracing our rich Jewish beauty, history, and diversity? This haggadah is one attempt to answer that call and to honor our history.